

Braley bill supports U.S. vets tortured by Iraq

QC Times, Ed Tibbetts

Washington, Jan 31 - U.S. Rep. Bruce Braley is wading into a five-year-old controversy between the Bush administration and 17 American military veterans who are seeking payment from Iraq's government for being tortured during the 1991 Gulf War.

Braley, D-Iowa, on Wednesday said he had filed a bill that would allow the former prisoners' claims to go forward. Last month, President Bush rejected a defense policy bill, arguing that the claims would hinder the new Iraqi government's reconstruction efforts.

"The president can no longer stand between these tortured POWs and the justice they deserve," Braley told reporters Wednesday.

The controversy stems from a 2002 lawsuit the U.S. prisoners filed against Iraq, seeking compensation for their injuries.

They won a nearly \$1 billion judgment in federal district court. But after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Bush administration intervened.

An appellate court sided with the administration, ruling U.S. law didn't permit the prisoners to sue the Iraqi government, just the individuals involved. The Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal in 2004, allowing the ruling to stand.

Congress added language to a defense policy bill last year to allow the case to go forward, but the president rejected it last month.

Braley and some of the plaintiffs, who appeared at the National Press Club last week, said lawsuits like these hold terrorist nations accountable. Braley also told reporters Wednesday the administration allowed other victims of Saddam Hussein to collect on claims, including some corporations and an ex-Quad-Citizen, Taleb Subh.

Subh, while a teenager, was held after the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and he collected on claims he filed against the Iraqis.

"I think it's just another example of the Bush administration placing corporate rights over human rights," Braley said.

The bill has a handful of high-ranking Democratic co-sponsors, and Braley hoped to get it to the House floor for a vote soon.